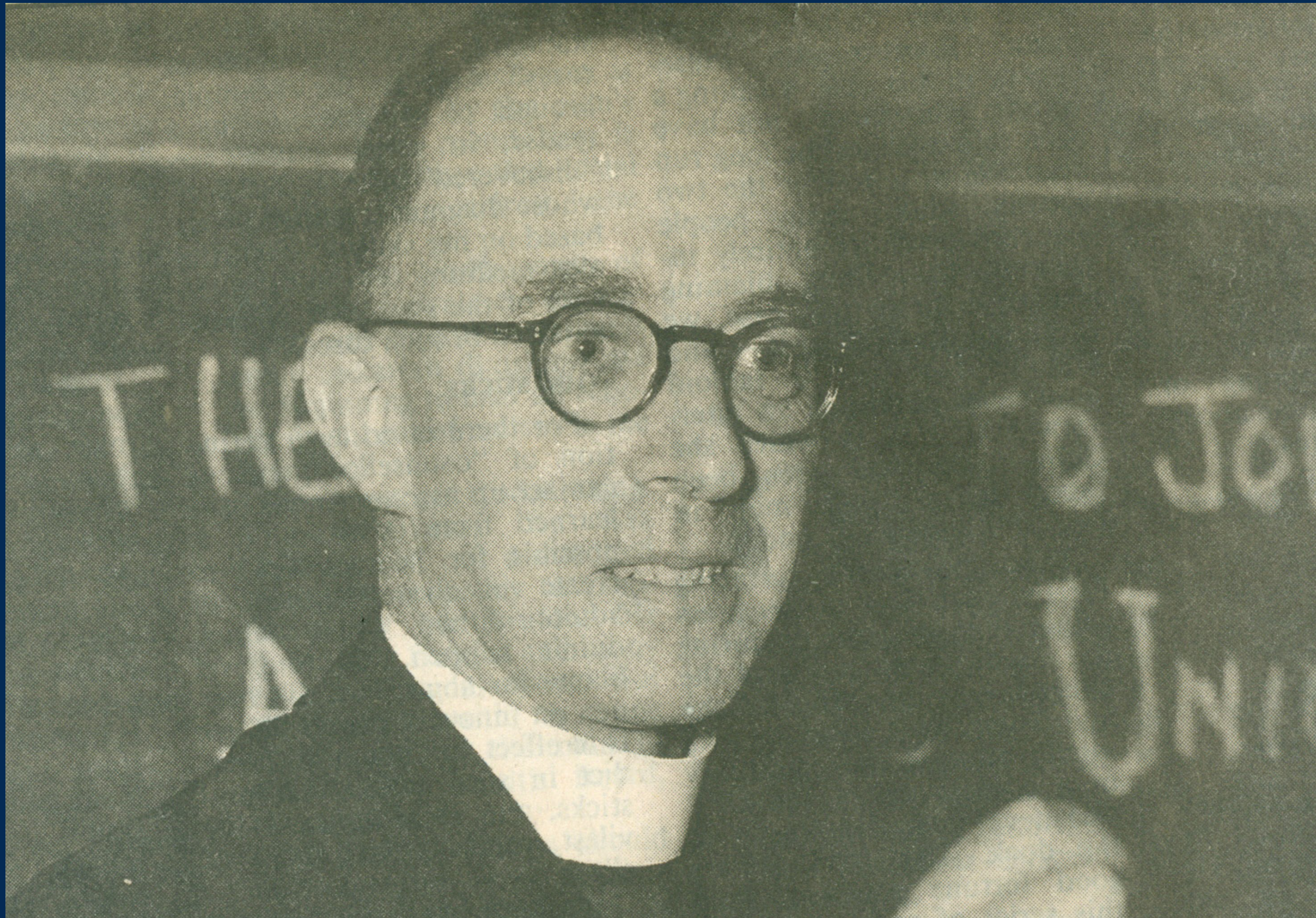


## The Success of the Early 1960s

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*Fr Edmund Kent, S.J.*

In 1961, the Catholic Workers College celebrated its 10th anniversary during a period of significant growth and success. There were 1,357 students enrolled in courses, and the College had fostered strong links with trade unions. By the early 1960s, there were students enrolled from 45 different trade unions, and over 100 businesses were attached to the College.

The introduction of a Board of Sponsors in the 1950s allowed unions and employers to take an active stake in the College. This collaboration influenced the development of courses and teaching methods, which ensured they remained relevant to working life. New courses were also introduced, such as courses on adult education and human relations.

The College also continued to demonstrate its growing national importance with visits and lectures by leading political figures, including the Taoiseach Seán Lemass and future Taoisigh, Garret Fitzgerald and Jack Lynch.

By 1964, student numbers reached a record high, with 1,820 students enrolled.

# The Renaming of the Catholic Workers College

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Despite the success of the early 1960s, the latter half of the decade brought about a significant shift in the Irish educational landscape. Developments such as the introduction of free secondary education and declining levels of attendance of trade union courses made it clear that the College needed to adapt.

On 28th March 1966, Fr Kent held a conference on 'Education for Industrial Relations'. At the conference he announced that the College would be renamed the College of Industrial Relations. The new focus would centre on continuing education for those involved in industrial relations, which reflected the evolving needs of Irish society.

*"In order to express more clearly the nature of the work that has been carried out at this college since 1951, the work will be continued in the future, and in order to focus attention on the more general educational need [...] The first great need [...] is to build an open society in industry, to break down ghetto mentality and create an atmosphere of freedom and mutual responsibility".*

Alongside this shift, the College placed a greater emphasis on student recruitment. While it was previously reliant on word-of-mouth, it began to use newspaper advertising to reach a wider audience.

Through these changes, the College demonstrated its ability to adapt to a rapidly changing educational and industrial landscape.

## The College in a Changing Ireland

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The late 1960s and early 1970s marked another period of major change for the College. In 1969, Fr Kent, who had been instrumental in shaping the College over the previous two decades, stepped down as Director. He was succeeded by Fr Kevin Quinn, who set the College on a path of renewal during a period of significant social and economic unrest in Ireland.

The 1970s were characterised by industrial unrest, rapid social change, and a shifting educational landscape. Academic standards were rising, demand grew for more professional programmes, and numbers in adult education were falling across the country. Against this backdrop, it became clear that the College would need to adapt if it was to continue to meet the needs of Irish workers.

Attendance at the College remained strong, with an average weekly attendance of around 70%, and pre-marriage courses continued to attract large numbers of engaged couples. However, enrolment in trade union courses declined. This prompted a major re-evaluation of the course content and teaching methods, as the College sought to respond to changing social, educational, and industrial conditions.



# National Diploma in Industrial Relations Studies

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In response to these challenges, the College introduced significant reforms. It partnered with the Institute of Chartered Accounts to establish a new course for articled clerks. The nine-month course brought in new students who were the first full-time students in the history of the College.



The curriculum expanded to include full-time, daytime, and day-release programmes, alongside traditional evening courses. The core lecturing staff increased, and the trade union course was shortened from four years to three to make it more accessible and refined for prospective trade union members.

During this period, the College also reaffirmed industrial relations as its main academic focus. This positioned the subject at the centre of its teaching and academic mission. Through this, it sought to establish itself firmly within Ireland's evolving educational landscape.

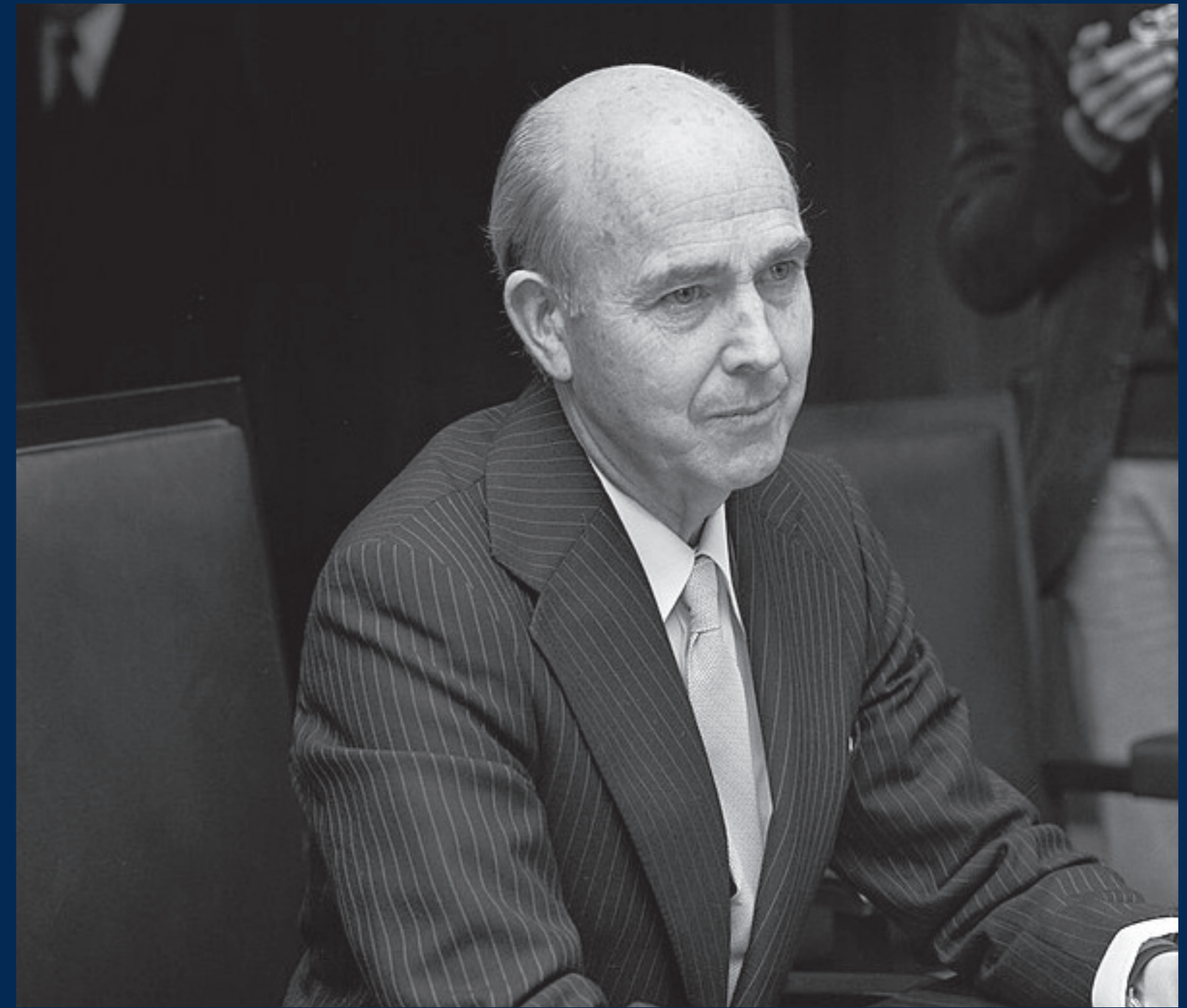
While setbacks occurred, a decisive turning point came in 1973 with the appointment of Fr John Brady as Director. He was a founding member of the Irish Association for Industrial Relations and a lecturer in economics. Fr Brady brought renewed momentum and academic credibility to the College.

Under his leadership, the College applied to the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) for recognition of its Diploma in Industrial Relations. Following extensive negotiations, the NCEA formally recognised the National Diploma in Industrial Relations Studies. This marked a significant breakthrough for the College as it was the first evening-study diploma course to receive NCEA recognition. The decision secured the College's position within Irish higher education and strengthened its role in promoting improved industrial relations nationwide.

## A Special Milestone

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Despite the challenges of the early 1970s, the College continued to grow and develop. Its commitment to adult education remained central to its mission. The College provided opportunities for men and women to engage in structured learning and contribute to more informed and constructive industrial relations.



*Pictured Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh (1975)*

In 1976, the College observed its Silver Jubilee. This marked 25 years of educational and social contribution. The President of Ireland, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh officially opened the celebrations on 30th April 1976. The three-day programme centred on the feast of St Joseph the Worker. It brought together staff, past students, and prominent figures from Irish public life.

The Jubilee was a celebration of the past and a statement of intent for the future. A commemorative booklet was put together for the occasion. It restated the College's mission and articulated its vision of its role in Irish society. It highlighted the College as a nationally recognised centre for adult education, and how it was committed to the improvement of industrial relations in Ireland.

Extract from the booklet:

*"It is the quality of thought of the work force as a whole, which ultimately determines what actually happens, as opposed to what experts think ought to happen. The presence in the work force of a significant number of people, even though a minority, who have been guided to think constructively about industrial relations, and who are able to articulate their views, can make a big difference to the outcome of events. In as much as such people find their way into positions of responsibility, their influence is increased".*